

THE GHOST AND MOLLY MCGEE

"TEACHING MR. PHAM"

525B-314 - Outline

Written by Brandon Hoang

INT. BRIGHTON MIDDLE SCHOOL - ENGLISH ROOM - DAY

MOLLY stands before the class reading her book report. She holds up an old, crumbling book. Molly: "And that concludes my report on, 'A Meandering Ramble of Self-Important Musings' by Olden White Man." LIBBY: "Uh, I think that's supposed to be Holden Whitman." Molly asks MR. PHAM to settle the argument, but once again, finds him sneaking in a nap at his desk, his eyelids painted to look like eyes. When Molly attempts to nudge him awake, Pham's arm knocks open a desk drawer revealing a treasure trove of plaques and trophies. Molly is stunned. Mr. Pham was once a rock star teacher?? She reads a thank you letter from one of his students as we transition into...

***A SONGBURST:** a poppy tune a la Brett Dennen's "Comeback Kid" plays over FLASHBACKS from when Mr. Pham was a bright-eyed bushytailed teacher - his gray hair is gone, his crowsfeet nonexistent. He struts the hallways, high-fiving students. A YOUNG O'CONNOR hands Pham another Teacher of the Year Award that he struggles to fit on a shelf with his others.*

Pham's teaching style is unconventional, but inspirational: he lets kids listen to music while doing exams, he swaps out boring, dated "classics" for new and refreshing titles, and teaches his lessons outdoors. But where Pham truly shines brightest is when he's teaching his beloved poetry course (he poses for a picture with kids holding up poetry trophies).

*The song slows and grows somber as we see the stuff that made Pham a standout get hammered down by red tape: the boombox dies and there's no budget to replace it, Pham's required to teach only the approved curriculum classics with no room for anything else, and Pham can't take kids outside for lessons -- the taxpayers pay for desks, so he has to use them. Pham struggles to stay positive. When the school board slashes funds and ends his poetry club it's the last straw for Pham. He goes gray and succumbs to the system. **END SONGBURST.***

BACK TO SCENE: Pham wakes and sees Molly going through his drawer. He quickly stuffs everything away and tells Molly to forget what she saw -- that was a long time ago. But once Molly sees something, she can't forget it: Molly wants to get Mr. Pham's spark back! She'll whip him back into the teacher he was and get that spark back!

INT. BRIGHTON MIDDLE SCHOOL - TEACHER'S LOUNGE - NEXT MORNING

Molly enters with a breakfast burrito and heads to the microwave, SCRATCH trailing behind. MR. BATES sputters - Ms. McGee?? No students in the teachers' lounge! Molly turns to him and the rest of the TEACHERS. Molly: "Today, I am a teacher. I'm going to teach Mr. Pham to be a great teacher again!" The teachers understand her drive but are skeptical - she'll never get through to him. But Molly stands firm - she never gives up on her teachers, err, *students*! Students who are also her teachers! Now, can she use the microwave or not? Miss Lightfoot shrugs - technically, she's a teacher, so... the others grumble in agreement. But once she's done with Pham, it's back to the Cafeteria!

Molly asks Scratch if he's gonna hang with her, but Scratch eyes the bagels and says he's gonna stick around here instead.

INT. BRIGHTON MIDDLE SCHOOL - ENGLISH ROOM - DAY

Molly stands on her desk, giving one heck of an inspirational speech about Pham needing to take chances, cast off the shackles, and disrupt the old system that's holding him back. She asks him to join her on the desk but.... Pham (arms crossed, kicked back in his chair) cuts Molly off, asking how standing on a desk is supposed to help him. A little deflated, she says it'll get him to see teaching from a different angle! Pham yawns: "Uh huh. O'Connor cut back janitor's hours so you're gonna have to clean up those footprints."

Molly is determined to inspire him and quickly shifts to plan B. She gestures to one of her many homemade inspirational posters. Mr. Pham: "'Be inspired to be inspired'? That doesn't even make sense. And is that supposed to be a bee or a flying potato?" (Molly: "Curse my ability to only draw potatoes!") Molly pulls out a shoddily-made candle: "What about this candle I made at Wax and Waynes?? Doesn't it smell like... *inspiration*?" Mr. Pham takes a whiff and gags: "No, it smells like bubble gum and poor choices?" Molly deflates: "Aw man. That was a three-wicker! I spent four weeks allowance on that!"

INT. BRIGHTON MIDDLE SCHOOL - TEACHER'S LOUNGE - DAY

Scratch gets sucked into all of the teachers' schoolyard gossip -- Mr. Bates went on a date, Miss Lightfoot microwaved fish again, and Miss Milo had knit everyone personalized vests! Scratch can't break away! They've got a whole *Abbott Elementary* vibe in here and he wants to be part of it!

Molly enters the lounge and laments over Pham. She pulled out all the inspirational moves she had and he didn't break! Didn't even crack a smile! Bates: "You're being too soft! Someone as stubborn as Pham needs tough love!" Molly considers this...

INT. BRIGHTON MIDDLE SCHOOL - ENGLISH ROOM - DAY

Mr. Pham fluffs his pillow and unfurls his blanket prepping for a nap when Molly kicks open the door, bullhorn blaring. Molly shouts: "You're going to make next week's lesson plan and you're gonna like it!" Pham protests: "But it's recess!" She slams a ruler on the desk, snapping Pham to attention -- recess is *cancelled*. She puts him through a series of teacher-drills (e.g. balancing books, sharpening pencils as fast as he can, writing "I will love teaching again" over and over on the whiteboard, etc.). At the end, Molly asks him if he's back to his old self again. Pham nods! Molly thinks she finally getting through to him! But Pham's nod was just him nodding off. Molly stomps over and discovers Pham had an ear bud in the entire time listening to "Sounds of the Sea: Calming Music to Catch Some Z's".

INT. BRIGHTON MIDDLE SCHOOL - TEACHER'S LOUNGE - DAY

Scratch starts behaving as if he's a teacher himself. He's even started sporting a tweed jacket with leather patches! He entrenches himself in all of the typical teacher stuff: accusing others of stealing lunch (it was him), complaining about grading papers on weekends, grousing about budget cuts: "Those idiots at the school board have no idea what we're dealing with!" The other teachers bond over the same topics but Scratch is so caught up in the fun he's having, he doesn't connect that they aren't actually talking WITH him.

INT. BRIGHTON MIDDLE SCHOOL - ENGLISH ROOM - DAY

Molly suggests that they get the blood-moving -- maybe Pham is a kinetic or melodic learner! Molly pulls out a boombox and starts in on her dance routine lesson. Songs help you remember! Remember the love of the profession! In true Molly fashion, she gets REALLY into it -- dramatic leaps, acrobatic splits, ribbon dancing using long pencil shavings taped to rulers. Molly is so entranced in her own lesson that she doesn't notice Pham casually exiting the classroom.

INT. BRIGHTON MIDDLE SCHOOL - TEACHER'S LOUNGE - DAY

Molly drags herself to the coffee maker and pours herself a mug of creamer. She failed.

She couldn't get Pham's spark back... The teachers tell Molly not to beat herself up too much, there are just some students that can't be helped. Molly worries they might be right -- maybe Mr. Pham really is a lost cause...

But Scratch has picked up a thing or two spending so much time among the teachers and imparts some wisdom to her: "Students can't be helped unless they WANT to be helped! A teacher's best tool is their student's motivation. What is it that makes Mr. Pham excited to learn? Once you uncover that, you'll get through to him..." Wow. Molly is impressed. He sure did learn a lot in here...

INT. BRIGHTON MIDDLE SCHOOL - ENGLISH ROOM - DAY

Molly sneaks in, singing a variation on the "spy ditty" she sang in 228. She takes another look in Pham's desk to find his motivation. Inside his desk drawer, tucked away, is a framed photo. Molly blows off the dust to reveal that it's the picture of Mr. Pham and his poetry class (the picture that was taken in Pham's flashback). He's not just smiling -- he's beaming! An idea! Poetry is the key to his motivation!

INT. BRIGHTON MIDDLE SCHOOL - ENGLISH ROOM - DAY

Molly tells Pham that she's written a poem that she'd like to recite to him. She reads it -- it's about a teacher who lost his way and the students who need him back. But ultimately, the poem is... not great. The metaphors labored, the meter is all over the place, and what is the rhyme scheme? Cob knows.

There's a long beat when Molly finishes. Pham: "Wow McGee that was... uh... really something." Molly deflates, she thought the poem would ignite something in him. But then Pham rolls up his sleeves and writes her poem on the whiteboard: "Take a look. You've got a great start but what if you tried this..." Pham gives Molly a mini poetry lesson. And it feels good, really good, to be teaching again! "Wait a second. McGee, you sly dog! You wrote a poem so bad that you knew I wouldn't be able to stop myself!" Molly forces a smile: "Uh, yeah, yeah... that was my plan all along..."

*We enter a **SONGBURST REPRISE: "I GOT YOU PHAM"** in the same style as earlier, only this time instead of growing somber, it grows even more happy and upbeat. Pham is back! He's a teaching machine. He's fully engaged with his students, he's got them at the edge of their seats. Pham chucks his trusty pillow and blanket into the trash. Molly and Pham polish his old trophies and together they hang up his old teaching awards around the classroom. He holds office hours and there's a long line out the door, spilling into the hallway, students **EXCITED** to learn.*

Pham is high-fiving kids as they walk down the hallways with their noses buried in their poetry books. Molly corners O'Connor and convinces him to reinstate Pham's old poetry class.

*Meanwhile, Scratch has gone full-blown teacher. He's teaching alongside Milo, Bates, and Melody (although the students can't see or hear him), he waits in line with his lunch tray flirting with the cafeteria lady, he yells at kids to walk in the hallways, shakes the vending machine when his snacks get stuck, but then remembers he's a ghost and floats inside to get it, etc, etc. **END SONGBURST***

INT. BRIGHTON MIDDLE SCHOOL - ENGLISH ROOM - LATER THAT DAY

Pham is teaching an after-school poetry appreciation class. The class is packed, his students are riveted. As class ends and they all file out into the hallway, Mr. Pham thanks Molly for helping him find his passion again. This was what he really loved about teaching - passing his love of learning to the next generation. Somewhere along the way, he lost sight of that and he's glad Molly helped him find it again. Molly beams but tells Mr. Pham it was in him all along. Who knows - maybe next year he'll win Teacher of the Year again! Mr. Pham chuckles, having his poetry class back is much better than any award. ...I mean his awards are feeling a little lopsided on the wall so he's definitely gonna try for it, really fill out the wall, but being a great teacher is the only award he really needs.

Mr. Pham heads into the Teacher's Lounge, but when Molly tries to follow she is stopped by Bates: "Uh uh uh, Ms. McGee. Teachers' only!" The door is shut in her face. She's a officially a student again! Aw man...

Scratch floats through the closed door and rejoins Molly. "I see you really whipped Pham into shape. It's all O'Connor can talk about! But whaddya think? Do I have a shot at Teacher of the Year?" Molly starts to remind him that he isn't actually a member of the faculty, but doesn't have the heart to tell him. You know, maybe he'll be retired by the next time that rolls around! So she acknowledges all of his "hard work" by gifting him the inspiration-scented candle instead. Scratch tears: "You got ME a three-wicker!? I mean teaching is its own reward but this?! This is... oh geez. What is this? It smells like bubblegum and regret!"

THE END.